

The left's howls of anguish are therefore essentially phony—and they stem from a growing realization that this crisis has largely destroyed the credibility of the far left. Forced to choose between the West and the Taliban, the hard left simply cannot decide. Far from concealing this ideological bankruptcy, we need to expose it and condemn it as widely and as irrevocably as we can. Many liberals are already listening and watching—and the tectonic plates of politics are shifting as they do.

INTRODUCTION OF THE COBRA COVERAGE ACT OF 2001

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2001

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the introduction of a piece of legislation that I believe is an essential component of our efforts to help those affected by the attacks of September 11th. My bill, the COBRA Coverage Act of 2001, will provide a 50 percent tax credit toward COBRA coverage for laid-off workers. I believe this is the best way for us to ensure that the thousands of Americans recently laid-off do not go without health insurance.

Under current law, commonly referred to as COBRA, workers who are laid off are allowed to remain in their employer-based health insurance plan for up to 18 months, provided they pay the full premium for the plan (their share plus the employer share) plus a small administrative fee. The problem is, the full premium for employment-based coverage averages almost \$2,500 per year for self-only coverage and about \$6,500 per year for family coverage.

Since COBRA coverage is very expensive, many laid-off workers let their insurance lapse, gambling that they won't get sick or injured before they find another job. We cannot continue to allow so many hard-working Americans and their families to go uninsured. We must find a way to make COBRA coverage more affordable for the thousands of laid-off workers trying to recover from the September 11th attacks.

And my bill does exactly that. The COBRA Coverage Act of 2001 provides continuing health care coverage for laid-off workers at half the price. Under this legislation, laid-off workers would be eligible for a tax credit for 50 percent toward the COBRA coverage premium. The credit would be limited to a maximum of \$110 for an individual and \$290 for a family per month, and would be administered by the employer. This way, workers can receive an immediate benefit and would not have to wait until the end of the year to claim tax credit.

Now, more than ever, we must ensure that American families can afford to remain insured in case of sickness or injury. We must take the lead in ensuring that the thousands of hard-working Americans who have fallen victim to the effects of the September 11th attacks are not set back even further by the lack of health insurance. I urge my colleagues to join me in this effort to make COBRA coverage more affordable for our laid-off workers.

THE FARM SECURITY ACT

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2001

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, my office has been contacted by dozens of groups expressing concerns about the Farm Security Act (H.R. 2646). I submit the following letter on their behalf.

OCTOBER 2, 2001.

Dear Representative: The one hundred forty-eight (148) groups listed below, from across the country representing family farmers and ranchers, sustainable agriculture, religious communities, environmental and wildlife concerns, consumers, and many other constituencies and issues have joined forces to urge you to vote against the Farm Security Act of 2001 (H.R. 2646). As agricultural and rural groups, we make this urgent plea to vote against a farm bill with great reluctance. However, this bill proposed by the House Agriculture Committee would continue and expand misguided policies that have driven commodity program spending to record high levels, while doing little to stem family farm decline and falling far short of providing solutions to the many conservation, rural development, credit, research and other needs of America's farmers, ranchers, and their communities. This nation needs a Farm Bill that works for family farms, ranchers, rural communities, consumers and the environment. Unfortunately, H.R. 2646 fails to do this.

Specifically, H.R. 2646 would:

Unfairly subsidize the nation's very largest farms, while encouraging overproduction, low prices, environmental distress, and large government payments in perpetuity.

Ignore the need for a competition title to address the impact of rapid consolidation in agriculture and to check anti-competitive behavior that harms farm and ranch families, consumers, rural communities and the environment.

Transform the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) into a subsidy program for huge, polluting, factory livestock operations.

Ignore the needs of beginning farmers and ranchers.

Cap and severely limit funds for conservation technical assistance for the Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve Programs.

Weaken the highly successful Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Phase out within the next five years nearly all direct lending programs within USDA.

Fail to increase the percentage of total farm bill funds dedicated to conservation, and ignore the calls for a comprehensive stewardship incentive program for working land.

Take only minimal steps to support marketing innovation and development and value-adding enterprises and to reverse the decline in public support for agricultural research.

Fail to address structural changes essential to assure fair and equitable delivery of USDA programs and services to all farmers, despite costly legal settlements brought on by USDA actions.

The results would do substantial harm to family farms, to our communities and the environment. For years, family farmers and ranchers and concerned citizens have been developing solutions to agricultural prob-

lems and putting them into practice on their farms and in their communities. In our view, the bill reported out by the House Agriculture Committee not only ignores these solutions, but in fact would make them more difficult to achieve.

H.R. 2646 was reported out of the House Agriculture Committee in July 2001 after just 15 hours of debate. Federal policy affecting our nation's agriculture system and food supply for the next ten years is much too important to be pushed through in a matter of days. This bill must go back to the House Agriculture Committee for the substantial debate and policy development process our nation needs and deserves.

At a minimum, a new round of deliberations on the Farm Bill by the House Agriculture Committee should include:

Removal of biases against small and moderate-scale agriculture, and assuring that all farmers receive equitable access and service.

Comprehensive assistance for all small-scale, socially disadvantaged and new farmers and ranchers not served by current programs.

Restoration of direct lending for all family-size farms.

Stewardship incentives for family farmers that provide real conservation and environmental benefits for our society.

Rural development, research and marketing programs that increase the farm and ranch share of food system profit and support development of new cooperative and small businesses.

Commodity programs that enable family farms to earn a fair price.

A competition title to increase competition and fairness in the domestic agricultural marketplace.

We respectfully request that you vote no on H.R. 2646.

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network.

Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO).

Agricultural Resources Center.

American Corn Growers Association.

Arkansas Natural Produce, Inc.

Ashland Community Food Store.

Berkeley Ecology Center (CA).

Berkeley Farmers' Market (CA).

Beyond Organic Communications.

Cabinet Mountain Market (MT).

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF).

California Church IMPACT.

California Farmers Union.

California Institute for Rural Studies.

California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.

California Wilderness Coalition.

C.A.S.A. de Llano (Communities Approaching Sustainable Agriculture) (TX).

C.A.T.A., Farmworker Support Committee (NJ).

Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association.

Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry, School Sisters of Notre Dame (MN).

Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College.

Center for Rural Affairs (NE).

Center for Sustainable Systems (KY).

Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana.

Coalition for the Bight (NY).

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (ME).

Colorado Organic Producers Association.

Columbia Area Food Circle (MO).

Community Farm Alliance (KY).